

Creative Analysis of “Zootopia” under the “User Experience” Theory

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Abstract—“Zootopia” is the 55th animated feature film produced by Disney Animation Studios. It gains success both in artistry and commerce, considered as a masterpiece. Artistic work is the integration of the creations realized by artistic skills. The thesis intends to analyze the creativity of “Zootopia” under “User Experience” Theory in science category and view the “creative” nature of artistic expression from the perspective of “experience”.

Keywords—user experience; creative analysis; Zootopia

I. INTRODUCTION

Recently, Disney animated film “Zootopia” created a miracle to earn over 1378.249 million \$^① for 31 days after the release and gain 8.4 in IMDB.^② The film did not only perform outstanding in box office, but also gained recognition on art aesthetics from the public. Some spectators even predict that “Zootopia” has won the Oscar for best animated feature for next year in advance. It is in no way an accident that Disney Animation Studios created this new masterpiece, the 55th animated feature film.

Artistic work is the integration of the creations realized by artistic skills. The animated feature film can represent “creativity” more in purity and refinement because it is produced with animations completely. To create beauty with creativity, “the aesthetic value can be realized only through the aesthetic interpretation and reception when appreciators appreciate the works. Only through artistic esthetic interpretation and reception can the appreciator with second-time experience achieve soul-talk with the author.”[1] To achieve the supreme artistic level, the work should be based on artistic interpretation and reception to realize esthetic value. It means that creativity should serve beauty and beauty examines the creativity. The thesis intends to analyze the creativity of “Zotopis” with “User Experience” Theory, to find out the “creative” nature of artistic expression from the perspective of “experience”. As Mr. Ye Lang mentions, the peak of freedom

¹ “Zootopia” is a 3D animated film produced by the Disney. It is co-directed by Rich Moore, Byron Howard and Jared Bush. It was on in China Mainland on March 4, 2016. Box office statistics was obtained on April 3 of the year on website: <http://www.cbooo.cn>.

² Internet Movie Database (abbreviated as IMDb) is an online database on actors, films, TV programs, TV stars and film production. At present, the most recognized film scoring is the scoring on IMDb. Data from http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2948356/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1.

lies on the connection between art and science. Science resorts to art for representation. They cannot leave each other. It is the only way to realize free aesthetic idea to interpret the beauty of the art with truth of the science.

II. AESTHETIC CONSTITUTION OF THE FILM UNDER “USER EXPERIENCE”

As the methodology in information era, “User Experience” proposes “user-oriented design”. In information product creation, user experience is divided the things into five levels from concrete to abstract: Presentation Layer, Framework Layer, Structural Layer, Border Layer and Strategic Layer. The presentation layer presents the “sensory experience” created by the product. The framework layer describes the “information design” of the product. The structural layer is concerned about information architecture in favor of user’s understanding. The border layer describes in detail the content elements required by the user with user requirement. The strategic level interprets the user need in nature. [2] Li Zhengdao mentioned that science and art are inseparable like two sides of the coin; based on human creativity, both pursue the universality of truth. [3] With this scientific method, we can dismantle the mixed elements step by step, deconstruct the esthetic constitution of the film from the perspective of “user experience” and analyze the beauty of the “creativities”. Thus, we can analyze the “integration of creativities” of the film, an integration of artistic works, with “user experience” as a method and find meaningful “creativities” as well as how they are expressed. It is the scientific method to verify aesthetic experience that we can try to construct the “creativities” based on “reception” and stimulate continuous collision between the aesthetic subjects and objects from creation stage to accomplish the art from five corresponding levels: the “image” on Presentation Layer, “scene setting” on Framework Layer, “model creativities” on Structural Layer, “theme reference” on Border Layer and “ideology” on Strategic Layer.

Essentially, the animated movie is a film genre not only for children. It utilizes virtual world to tell stories in real world. “Animation creation is a huge and systematic project. It includes many links, such as theme selection, script writing, art modeling, original painting, in-betweens, editing/composing, sound effect, special effects, re-recording, output, etc.”[4] Clark Spencer, the producer of “Zootopia”, comments that Animation could create an unprecedented world which makes

our world more genuine and believable.” “Zootopia” achieves the fantasy of highest level, which is truer than the truth with Spencer’s idea and mature film technologies. The thesis intends to take the text above as an evidence to analyze the user experience elements for such unprecedented success of “Zootopia” and propose a new creative dimension for the animated movie. User experience is a new thinking for film creation. It represents an artistic text composition from concrete to abstract and from microscopic to macroscopic.

III. THE CREATIVE ANALYSIS OF USER EXPERIENCE ELEMENTS IN CLASSICAL SCENES

A. Presentation Layer Elements Analyze Film Images

“Zootopia” is more an animal metropolis than animal utopia. At the beginning, sitting on the dream-catch train, Judy Hopps leads the audiences into the fabulous “Zootopia” preset. The editing is clear and simple; scene setup is standard and the scheduling is concise. The director used Subjective point of view tactfully at the beginning so that the audience can follow Judy’s view like sitting on a dashing train on a winding track. The shot pushes from left to right generally to meet our visual habit. The shot language is concise, panorama or long shot of one scene followed by a close-up or close shot with occasional depth of field of foreground and background. The continuous switch of multiple shots and angles expresses enthusiastic expectation of the upcoming scenes. Then, the “Zootopia” appeared suddenly in a panorama to express Judy’s mood when she arrived in the metropolis wished for long time from the Burrows. In the beginning, the director adopts vivid colors to portray the scenes outside the train exquisitely. The overall visual style is constructed in the shock of the audience. More remarkable still is the technical process of the animal hairs. It represents the peak in film industry. In 2012, the Disney software engineers set about the animal hair process early during the planning of the film. The engineers created hairs different in color and texture for different animals with natural motion against static and monotonous visual perception. Moreover, it is a prospective creation to plant hairs for animals by visual development department instead of render back-ends and transfer to technical department for motion process. Finally, the animal images with realistic hairs were presented to the audience, such as the lovely Judy, the rabbit, with over 2.5 million hairs, the sheep, the deputy mayor, with soft and fluffy hairs and the fox, Nick, who transform when touched. The rendering is so exquisite as to provoke synesthesia from vision to touch. Such an amazing visual effect through such a huge project presents an ultimate pursuit on the image. Such extraordinary audio-visual experience superior to live action movies is originated from the control of the elements in presentation layer during film creation. AbelGance said that it is the soul of the image that constitutes the film, not the image itself. [5] For animated film, technique realizes the creativity with image as the entry point as in "Fig. 1".



Fig. 1. Eco-map of Zootopia.

B. Scene Setting Analysis by Framework Layer Elements

Different from live action movie, all the scenes in animated films are reproduced virtually. The scene setting should eliminate the impact superimposed blindly by visual spectacles and not pursue the fantasy unilaterally. It should be originated from the real world plus some change and mixture of ecological elements so as to stand on a unified world view. The scene design should proceed as a perspective and prevailing conception. In this case, the scene setting can realize the integration and regeneration of the roles and character relations. Standing in the sight-viewer car, Judy looks into the distance. Across the sea, a metropolis full of skyscrapers jumps into our sight. There are various colors and distinct layers in the scene of the city. In the city, various skyscrapers stand in great numbers, interspersed with various life elements, such as metros, buses, taxis, elevators, cinemas, commercial streets, parks, police stations and residential buildings, etc. For the first time, Disney invited numerous anthropologists, psychologist, urban planners and architects to co-design the six different ecological systems: Sahara Square, Tundratown, Rainforest District, Bunnyburrows, Savanna Central and Little Rodentia, which were combined in the realistic zootopia. There are special driers for hippos and slides for mouse. Giraffes can drink without lowering their heads through the drink ascending channel. Over 400 kinds of animals, predator or herbivore, live together in this huge ecological city. Though it is artificial, the city seems so real. It is a highly civilized modern city where we can see many traces of human society but human beings never appeared. All the animals live in this city in personification. The creative group took 18 months for animal research to ensure the scientificity of zootopia. They visited the animal experts all over the world including those in Walt Disney World's Animal Kingdom in Orlando. They even established squad to travel all over the world. They visited Kenya in Africa, 9000 miles away, for observation of animal personalities and behaviors for two weeks. These visits

inspired them for the scenes in the film, such as Tundratown, Sahara Square, Bunnyburrows (Judy's hometown), etc.

Then, the city is established in subject macroscopic construction. However, the details require more microscopic rendering of scene setting. The theme music proceeds into the cheerful refrain when Judy arrives at the station. The panorama follows the back shadow of Judy. Low-angle shot is adopted when our heroine, from the village to the city, skitters into the open and bright square from the station in the shadow. Then, Judy's excitement is magnified at this moment. The fabulous city is also amazing for the audience. The prototype of the city is New York. The prototype of the station is the Atocha Station in Madrid. All the architectures are uniform and complete from the structure to decoration, from exterior to interior. On the square is the scene of life that animals of all groups start a new day in order. The personified reality helps the audience to know the zootopia. On a huge screen plays the greeting video of Gazelle. All the buildings in view are ecologicalized, abandoning the cold appearance of human society. The lines of skyscrapers are round and soft. The mushroom roof sprouting from the building, fish-scale glasses, rippled horn pillars, all these are very natural. Like the square in human society, there are paintings, sculptures, decorations and green space on the square in the film. Large amount of information points, delicate details and consistent "world view", these are the "meaningful forms" mentioned by Susanne Langer, which bring the audience into a world of false or true complement. This city is not only construction of buildings, but also an organic integration of spatial art, environmental design and artistic design.

C. Analysis of Type Model Creativity by Structural Layer Elements

The film is about Judy, a rabbit, who dreams of becoming a police officer in zootopia since her childhood. Enthusiastic, hard-working and ambitious, she wants to break the prejudice that rabbits cannot be police and finally becomes the first rabbit police officer in the police station full of big animals. To prove herself, she determines to detect a mystery. To find out the truth, she has to ask for helps from Nick, a fox living by conning in the city. She finds out that there is a giant conspiracy to overthrow the zootopia behind the case. They have to cooperate to unveil the truth about the conspiracy. In nature, "Zootopia" is a typical one-liner crime film. In animated film, the role setting is prior to visual design. All the roles' personalities, shaping, clothing and motions belong to role setting. The role designs are very contrasting and comedic in the film. Moreover, numerous supporting roles are as lively as the leading roles. All the figures are of multi-dimensional personality. During the character design, the producer would put up the photos of the prototype stars so that their employees could understand the roles. The roles are based on but also detached from the reality. At the beginning, Nick was taken as the leading role as one of the dominant predators which account for 10% of the animals in the nature. However, Nick is a negative role seeking for psychological redemption. He does not like Zootopia. Thus, his point of view is not in favor of the audience's psychological acceptance on Zootopia. Thus, the creation group transferred the leading role to brave and

positive Judy, a common person in consistent pursuit of a more beautiful world with her own effort. In this case, the audience would hold more expectation and love to Zootopia like Judy. It will also arouse empathy when Judy runs into frustrations. For example, when Judy just arrived in the metropolis, she took fast food alone in her small and shabby room; the first day in the police station, she, so ambitious, was finally sent to assist in traffic management, a work seemingly not for a real police officer. Though the film just tells a very simple story, the key point lies in the content of the story. The film does not only attract the audience's attention and satisfy their sensory requirements, but also interests the audience with an original industrialized story at the same time. This is the success of the design under Structural Layer elements in the film. We can find strong contrasts between Nick and Judy. Nick, an evil role, is a predator, tall, with dark hairs and negative personality while Judy, a righteous role, is an herbivore, short, with bright hairs and positive personality. We can explore this film from "Form ever Follows Function", the modernism core spirit proposed by Sullivan. A gentle and love rabbit becomes partners with a cunning fox, her natural enemy, to detect a case. They undergo twists and turns together during detection. Who is behind the conspiracy? The dramatic conflicts and plot reversals keep on pushing the development of the story. The support roles are also outstanding. Their designs of external images and internal characters are coherent with the theme, abundant but not redundant, various but not disordered. We can also find some obvious contrasts from some support roles, such as their names. Sloth, the civil servant in DMV, is called Flash. Shrew, a gang leader, is called Mr. Big. Moreover, the deputy mayor, a gentle sheep, is actually the chief plotter. All the designs are based on the roles without any redundancy and deliberate mystifying. The conflict from simple and real figures in contrast as well as their relationships brings a strong aesthetic impact to the audience, bringing a sense of immersion more easily. It is also a metaphor for its ideology as in "Fig. 2".



Fig. 2. Film still of "Zootopia".

"Zootopia" does not only reach an unprecedented altitude in role shaping for animated films, but also makes numerous attempts on narrative method and business type orientation. The creation of animated films also relies on the current social environment. In information era, the animated films in Disney do not only focus on artistic value, but also keeps on the creation and innovation in consideration with the relationship between the film type and the market. The film adopts the typical dramatic pattern of Disney: opening, development, climax and ending, which divides the plot into several units with explicit functions. These units are closely linked together to make the plot full of ups and downs as well as remarkable

details. In the narrative circumstances of the film, all the beauties and dilemmas in human nature are interspersed in the fantastic spectacle, such as the friendship between the fox and the rabbit, the affection between Mr. Big and his daughter, etc. Some globalized elements are integrated in the film, such as Chinese panda and Australian koala. Laughingstocks springing one after another, abundant stingers implied, commercial sensitive elements for the society handled from different perspectives, commercialization is integrated perfectly with aesthetic pursuit in the film. It is abrupt and stiff no more. In return, the success in the market pushes the artistic sublimation.

D. The Analysis of Theme Reference by Border Layer Elements

“Zootopia” reveals a universal value that anyone can do anything through Judy who persists in her dream after many accidents, frustrations and depressions and finally succeeds in self-achievement and maintaining justice. The first day in the police station, she, so small, found herself crowded in a group of big animals. However, she still greeted with her neighbor, a rhino, enthusiastically; she still said: “I want to make the world a better place.” This is the theme of eternal love in American films. Seen from the basic level of universal value and the American cultural cornerstone, “the search for love and individualism”, though the story happens in the virtual world, Zootopia is a scientifically realistic world-class metropolis very inclusive and highly civilized. It owns law construction, professional divisions of labor, multi-species cultures and moral ideas.

Commercial success adapts Disney’s animated film to the audience from different backgrounds. This film makes a reasonable judgment macroscopically on the audience and their value connotations under the context of trans-culture communication. In this film, children see the friendship between Nick and Judy and the happy ending of virtue rewarded and vice punished; young people see the hardship and the sense of accomplishment in pursuit of dreams in big cities all alone; adults see the political metaphors and the prejudices among social classes. The film tells story with various approaches, integrates the universal value and American culture, blends the intercultural themes and American humors together and interweave Judy’s individualism with the group ideal, pursuing justice and eliminating prejudice.

E. The Analysis of the Ideology by Strategic Layer Elements

Zootopia is a very diverse world. It accepts various animals to live in. Every animal can know himself through self-search in this world. Predators and herbivores enjoy the equal rights. When Leodore Lionheart is arrested, Judy has finished her self-search. Then, the film leads to the ideological reflections on “eliminating prejudice”, where its greatness lies. Even in this post-modern animal utopia, prejudices are influencing inevitably the habitants’ life. The police station is full of big animals. Mice who behave correctly and cautiously in suites and ties work in financial industry. During Judy’s pursuit, the most pressured for her is the prejudice of Chief Bogo, which represents the prejudice of the advantaged group over disadvantaged group. At the beginning, Nick ran into the

prejudice from Judy. Judy brought “anti-fox spray” on her in their first meeting. Even through hardships and dangers together, Judy blurted out a racist viewpoint that predators’ savage behavior was originated from their DNA, grilled by the journalists in press conference, which upset Nick so much that he left alone. These plots are not simply for elaborating the theme. They present two kinds of prejudices: the common prejudices of the bullied and the harmless and subconscious prejudices. This film intends to demonstrate us a value system to eliminate social prejudices which include those harmless and subconscious prejudices in the society.

IV. CONCLUSION

“Zootopia” is an excellent animated film. It has reached an aesthetic level of reality which transcends the reality. Based on reception aesthetics, the thesis analyzes the film’s creative integration of the image, scene setting, type model, theme reference and ideology which correspond to the five layers, which are Presentation Layer, Framework Layer, Structural Layer, Border Layers and Strategic Layer, with “User Experience” as methodology in information era. The thesis also intends to view the nature of creativity from the perspective of “experience” so as to provide a new point of view to create and appreciate animated films and a new thinking that creativity serves the beauty.

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